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ABSTRACT

Three randomly selected third grade classes participated in a study to discover the value of guided television watching on listening skills. The first class was a control group and received no special instruction or treatment, the second class received daily listening lessons, and the third group watched television guided by the use of teacher questions asked ahead of time to arouse the children's interest. A pretest and posttest on listening were given each of the groups. The pretest scores showed little difference among the groups. On the posttests, the group exposed to guided television watching scored higher than did the other two groups on both the vocabulary test and the posttest paragraph. The group that had been taught listening skills had the second highest scores. (TJ)

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LISTEN TO TELEVISION

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It is a simple matter for the classroom teacher to place the blame for any number of educational ills on the broad and bent shoulders of television; it is not only easy but popular to do so. Some of these criticisms, such as those directed at the violence portrayed in certain television programs, are justified. Others are not; they are simply unjust reactions from individuals who consider the entertaining nature of television to be unfair competition. As a result, the television set has been blamed for everything from lack of student interest in school to the atrophy of the brain and one's creativity.

The authors of this article do not perceive television to be an evil which has beset our society. We believe, as with the Chinese philosophy of "yin and yang," that there undoubtedly is some good in the medium. Due to this as well as its pervasiveness, with ninety-six percent of American homes possessing at least one set (U.S. News and World Report, 1972), it was our feeling that means for its utilization should be explored.

With this saturation of television sets throughout the nation, it behooves the educator to investigate the employment of television for instructional purposes. There is a wide range of fine programs on "educational" television channels which are being used by teachers to communicate content in various curricular areas. But can more be done to utilize television? What language arts areas could be developed through guided television viewing?

The area of listening immediately presents itself as one which lends itself to investigation. The reasons are obvious: 1) children spend time listening to television as well as viewing it; 2) television exposes children to new concepts and the vocabulary representing those concepts; 3) improvement in vocabulary aids improvement in listening since children understand more of what they hear; and, perhaps most importantly, 4) listening instruction is the most neglected aspect of the language arts curriculum. Most listening "instruction" is incidental learning, rather than a planned part of the daily instructional program.

Various studies have shown that students spend a high proportion of the school day in activities which depend upon listening. Schools, however, have not attached a corresponding degree of importance to this skill since studies have also indicated that most schools have shown a lack of attention to listening instruction. These concerns led to the design and implementation of a study done during 1978 with third graders.

Description

Three third grade classrooms were randomly selected to participate in the study. The teachers and the children were told only that some information was desired regarding children's ability to listen.

The listening section of the Durrell Listening-Reading Series was given to all three groups of students. This served as the pretest and results derived from it indicated that the groups were quite similar in ability at the study's inception.

The first of the three groups served as the control group. In a manner consistent with such group, no treatment or special instructional practices were given this group.

Group Two received daily listening lessons as provided by the SRA "Listening Language Laboratory Ic." The forty-eight lessons contained in these materials were followed explicitly by the teacher (as verified by regular observations conducted by the investigators) in order to insure that the students received regular, systematic listening instruction.

During the time period when Group Two was receiving listening instruction, Group Three was directed to spend an equal amount of time watching television. This was in addition to the time normally spent watching television in the school. In addition, the teacher of Group Three was asked to make this extra viewing time "guided viewing" through the use of several questions designed to pique children's interest prior to the viewing as well as to monitor their comprehension following the television program. The total amount of time spent, however, including the viewing and the questioning/discussion, could not exceed the amount of time spent in the directed listening activities by Group Two.

When the children in Group Two finished the forty-eight lessons in the SRA listening program, the listening section of the Durrell Series was administered to all of the students in the three groups. This represented the post-test aspect of the investigation.

Results

As was previously stated, the three groups were approximately equal in listening ability at the beginning of the study. Since

differences were found to exist among the three groups at the conclusion of the investigation, these differences could be attributed to the treatment variable.

With regard to the vocabulary section of the listening test, both the students who participated in guided television viewing (Group Three) as well as the students who received listening instruction (Group Two) scored appreciably higher on the post-test than the control group. On an average, students in the guided television group scored higher than those in the listening instruction group.

Significant differences were also found to exist among the post-test paragraph means of the three groups. Students who received guided television instruction attained the highest scores in this section of the test. Students who were in the listening instruction group scored next best, with their scores being several points higher than those of the control group.

Implications

The authors of this article are not going to offer television as education's panacea. They do feel, however, that the results of this investigation do merit some rather serious consideration by elementary educators.

For years, educators have been urging the inclusion of listening instruction into the school curriculum. In all candor, it must be stated that the majority of schools have done a poor job in this area. Some schools have ignored listening instruction entirely while others have left it to "the discretion of the teacher." Even when listening

units or programs have been utilized, generally they have been superficial in content and ineffective with regard to achievement.

Guided television viewing seemed to offer at least a feasible alternative to the current efforts of schools with regard to listening instruction. The program was relatively simple to implement, requiring a minimal amount of both preparation time and professional expertise on the teacher's part. The content of the "lessons" seemed to be more interesting and appealing than commercially prepared materials and most teacher made activities which the authors have witnessed. Using conventional purpose-for-reading techniques, the teacher was easily able to "ready" a group for a program, as well as to conduct appropriate follow-up questioning.

In these days of accountability, the results attained by utilization of guided television viewing must also be mentioned. The results of the students in the guided television viewing group were superior in both the vocabulary and paragraph sections of the Durrell Listening-Reading Series. Additionally, it must be honestly stated that the students in this group genuinely enjoyed this method of learning. The overwhelming majority of students were extremely attentive during viewing time, with discipline problems and inattentive behavior practically nonexistent.

Are you satisfied with your school system's listening instruction program? If your answer to this question is "NO," then why not give guided television viewing a try?